

VZCZCXYZ0409
PP RUEHWEB

ZNY CCCCC ZOC STATE ZZH
MSI4642
PP RUEHC RUEHWH
DE RUEHCV #0284/01 0631930
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 031930Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0713
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000284

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

HQSOUTHCOM FOR POLAD
DEPARTMENT FOR AID/OTI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/02/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTRY: CHANGES AND VACANCIES

REF: 06 CARACAS 00779

CARACAS 00000284 001.3 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT RICHARD DOWNES,
REASON 1.4 (D)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: THE VENEZUELAN MINISTRY OF PEOPLE'S POWER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS (MFA) HAS GONE THROUGH SIGNIFICANT PERSONNEL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES IN RECENT MONTHS WITH FOUR OUT OF THE FIVE VICE-MINISTERS EITHER RESIGNING OR BEING RE-ASSIGNED. PRESIDENT CHAVEZ ANNOUNCED FEBRUARY 19 THAT FRANCISCO ARIAS CARDENAS, THE VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS (REFTEL), WOULD SERVE AS THE NEW VICE-MINISTER FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN. ARIAS CARDENAS'S REPLACEMENT, ALONG WITH THE THREE REMAINING VICE-MINISTER SLOTS, REMAIN OPEN. END SUMMARY.

MFA EXODUS

12. (SBU) IN LATE 2007 VICE-MINISTER FOR EUROPE RODRIGO CHAVES SAMUDIO WAS TRANSFERRED TO THE VENEZUELAN EMBASSY IN GREECE, REPORTEDLY AS AMBASSADOR. VICE-MINISTER FOR ASIA VLADIMIR VILLEGAS AND VICE-MINISTER FOR AFRICA REINALDO BOLIVAR BOTH RESIGNED. IN EARLY 2008 VICE-MINISTER FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN RODOLFO SANZ WAS REASSIGNED TO HEAD THE MINISTRY OF PEOPLE'S POWER FOR BASIC INDUSTRIES AND MINING. VICE-MINISTER FOR NORTH AMERICA AND VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR TO THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS) JORGE VALERO REPORTEDLY HAD TO TAKE OVER THE REMAINING POSTS UNTIL REPLACEMENTS WERE NAMED.

VILLEGAS'S RESIGNATION

13. (C) MEDIA RUMORS REPORT VICE-MINISTER FOR AFRICA REINALDO BOLIVAR STEPPED DOWN BECAUSE THE UPSURGE OF BRV ACTIVITY IN AFRICA WAS WEARING ON HIM. VILLEGAS, ON THE OTHER HAND, GAVE A CANDID DECEMBER 3 INTERVIEW TO CARACAS DAILY "EL NACIONAL," IN WHICH HE CRITICIZED CHAVEZ AND LAMENTED THE LACK OF DIALOGUE WITHIN CHAVISMO. VILLEGAS RESIGNED DECEMBER 5, CITING AS THE REASON HIS DESIRE TO RETURN TO JOURNALISM, HIS ORIGINAL PROFESSION. HE NOW CO-HOSTS A POPULAR POLITICAL TELEVISION TALK SHOW WITH AN OPPOSITION-ORIENTED JOURNALIST.

THE RUMOR MILL: LIKELY CANDIDATES ARE CHAVEZ LOYALISTS

14. (C) CHAVEZ'S APPOINTMENT OF ARIAS CARDENAS AS VICE-MINISTER OF LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN DOES NOT COME AS A SURPRISE. ARIAS CARDENAS BOLSTERED HIS CHAVISTA CREDENTIALS BY LEADING THE "YES" CAMPAIGN IN ZULIA STATE. THE "NO" WON BY A WIDE MARGIN THERE BUT, GIVEN HIS PERSONAL HISTORY, ARIAS CARDENAS'S ACTIONS ON BEHALF OF THE REFORMS WAS IMPORTANT. HE HAS ALSO BEEN A VISIBLE SUPPORTER OF CHAVEZ'S DRIVE TO CREATE A SINGLE PRO-GOVERNMENT PARTY. HE WAS ALSO RUMORED TO BE VYING TO BE THE PSUV CANDIDATE IN THE ZULIA GOVERNOR'S RACE.

15. (SBU) SINCE ARIAS CARDENAS'S APPOINTMENT THE BRV HAS GIVEN NO INDICATION WHEN IT WILL NAME REPLACEMENTS. IN THE INTERIM, THE LOCAL PRESS IS SPECULATING ON SUCCESSORS. CARACAS DAILY "EL UNIVERSAL," REPORTS VICE-MINISTER AND OAS AMBASSADOR, JORGE VALERO AND VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED STATES BERNARDO ALVAREZ ARE LIKELY CONTENDERS FOR THE UNITED NATIONS SLOT. GERMAN MUNDARAIN, THE FORMER DIRECTOR OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE IS RUMORED TO BE IN LINE TO REPLACE VALERO. MUNDARAIN WAS VERY ACTIVE IN THE LEAD-UP TO THE DECEMBER 2 CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM, WHICH INCLUDED GOING ABROAD TO EXPLAIN AND DEFEND THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS. AN MFA OFFICIAL DENIED A RUMOR THAT FOREIGN MINISTER MADURO MAY BE REPLACED BY FORMER MINISTER OF EDUCATION ARISTOBULO ISTURIZ.

MFA RESTRUCTURING TO SERVE CHAVEZ'S INTERESTS

16. (C) OTHER POSSIBLE CHANGES IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAVE ALSO ALARMED SOME MID TO LOW LEVEL MFA WORKERS. IN 2007 THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY INTRODUCED A REFORM THAT WOULD CHANGE THE CURRENT FOREIGN SERVICE LAW TO CREATE A DIPLOMATIC CORPS DEDICATED TO FULFILLING THE GOALS AND MISSION OF CHAVEZ'S BOLIVARIAN AGENDA. THE REFORM HAS NOT YET BEEN ENACTED, BUT

CARACAS 00000284 002.4 OF 002

OTHER MEASURES WERE TAKEN TO 'RE-STRUCTURE' THE MFA. IN JANUARY 2008, THE BRV ANNOUNCED TEMPORARY MFA WORKERS' CONTRACTS WOULD NOT BE RENEWED AND ASKED FOR THE DIRECTORS OF THE MFA TO VOLUNTARILY SUBMIT THEIR RESIGNATIONS, IN AN ATTEMPT TO WEED OUT MFA WORKERS NOT CONSIDERED SUFFICIENTLY "BOLIVARIAN."

COMMENT

17. (C) UNDER CHAVEZ AND FOREIGN MINISTER MADURO, THE MFA HAS BEEN WEAKENED, POLITICIZED AND MARGINALIZED. DIPLOMATS FROM COUNTRIES THAT ENJOY OSTENSIBLY "CLOSE" RELATIONS WITH THE BRV COMPLAIN OF ESCALATING MFA INCOMPETENCE AND INEFFICIENCY. THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS SUGGESTS THE SITUATION WILL NOT IMPROVE IN THE NEAR TERM. END COMMENT.
DUDDY